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ABSTRACT

This report addresses issues concerned with reporting educational results for students with disabilities, identifies principles to guide reporting practices, and offers recommendations. The report notes that there are many purposes for reporting and that reporting information on students with disabilities is important because it ensures that they are included in the accountability system. The issue also presents data on the status of individual states in reporting assessment results for students with disabilities and in complying with reporting requirements of the Improving America's Schools Act and the reauthorized Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. The following assessment principles, derived from an analysis of current state practices, are proposed: (1) include data from all test takers in performance reports; (2) include rates of exclusion specific to students with disabilities and the reasons for the exclusion; (3) use consistent guidelines to calculate participation or exclusion rates; (4) maintain records which allow data for students with disabilities to be reported separately, overall, or by other breakdowns; (5) keep records on the types of testing accommodations provided; and (6) inform parents about reporting policies. States are also urged to report the academic performance of students with disabilities with the same regularity as students without disabilities. (DB)

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NCEO POLICY DIRECTIONS

Number 8 June 1997

Reporting Educational Results for Students with Disabilities

Background

Public reporting of educational results is becoming an increasingly important tool for making public schools accountable for helping students attain higher educational standards. New federal mandates, too, emphasize the importance of establishing on-going reporting systems that include all students, including students with disabilities.

The reporting of educational results is tied closely to the issues of participation in accountability systems and the provision of accommodations for students with disabilities. It does not make sense to have students participate in accountability systems and receive needed accommodations, but not report the results. Yet, this is happening in many places.

There are differing views of how best to report educational results for students with disabilities. Some of the questions that need to be answered include:

- What is the purpose of reporting educational results?
- Why is reporting important?
- What principles should guide decisions about how to report educational results for students with disabilities?

What is the Purpose of Reporting?

There are many purposes for collecting data on the results of education, one purpose being to improve instruction. *Public* reporting provides information about how schools are doing, and serves as an accountability tool for education. However, the primary purpose of public reporting is to share information for accountability purposes.

Almost all states now publish at least one statewide educational accountability report on the condition of public education. Some states have five or six reports. The reports vary widely in their format and the types of information they contain. Some feature achievement test results for schools or districts, not just overall state-level results. Many states also include non-test performance measures, such as graduation or promotion rates. Other states expand their reporting to include measures of educational inputs and processes, such as per-pupil expenditures, student-teacher ratios, and other indicators believed to have a direct impact on student outcomes.

Why is Reporting Important?

Reporting information on students with disabilities is important because it ensures that they are in the accountability system. Failure

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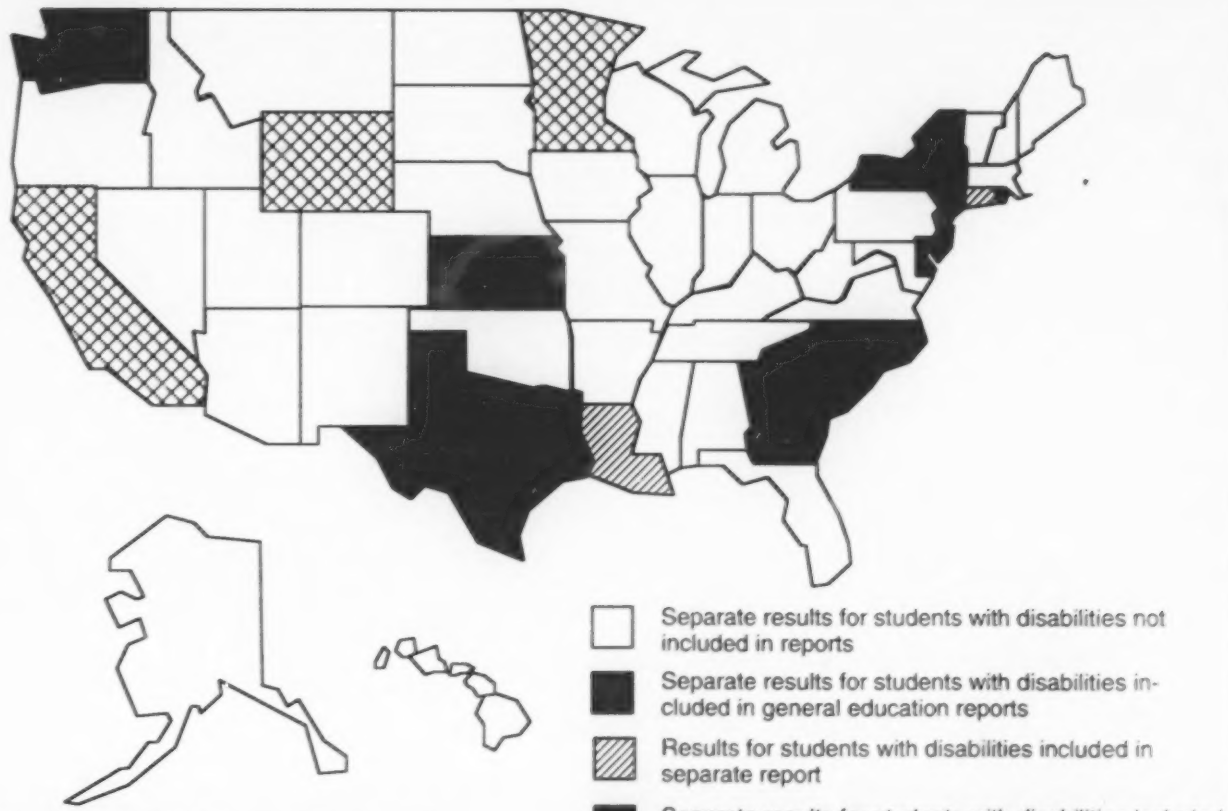
to report assessment results is one of the most common ways in which students with disabilities have been excluded from educational accountability (see NCEO Policy Directions 6, *Increasing the Participation of Students with Disabilities in State and District Assessments*). What is reported is what the public knows, and what the public reacts to. Some say that "what is measured is what is treasured." It is probably valid to say that what is reported is what we attend to in educational reform.

While most states publish accountability reports, very few publicly report on educational results for students with disabilities (see Figure 1). In fact, most state agencies have not even kept track of the rate at which students in special education participate in testing. The limited data that do exist show large differences among states and individual assessments in participation rates. Such variability makes it difficult to compare schools or school systems, and prevents policy-relevant conclusions to be drawn about how students with disabilities are benefiting from their educational experiences.

Failure to report scores of students with disabilities sends the message that they are not important — that

Figure 1. States that Report Assessment Results for Students with Disabilities*


Separate results for students with disabilities not included in reports
Separate results for students with disabilities included in general education reports
Results for students with disabilities included in separate report
Separate results for students with disabilities included in both general education and separate reports
No accountability report**

* Figure represents data current for June, 1997.
** California's testing system is currently under revision; Minnesota is currently developing an accountability system; an assessment system is under consideration in Wyoming.

the students do not count. This is an inappropriate message at a time when it is extremely important to document the performance of all students and to be accountable for their learning.

Policymakers clearly took this to heart with recent legislation. New federal policies require states to ensure that students with disabilities participate in their assessment systems; they also require public reporting. These requirements are most evident in the Improving America's Schools Act (IASA), which supports Title I programs, and the reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), which supports special education programs.

Among its other reporting requirements, IASA includes the requirement that programs report student performance on the state assessment, and that the performance of students with disabilities be identified by category of disability. Similarly, the 1997 reauthorization of IDEA requires the inclusion of students with disabilities in statewide assessment systems. Alternate assessments must be developed for those who cannot participate in the regular testing program. States must report on the academic performance of students with disabilities in the same way and with the same regularity as they do for students without disabilities.[1]

Principles to Guide Reporting Practices

States should consider several principles when developing policies and practices in reporting assessment data for students with disabilities. The following principles are based on an analysis of current state practices.

▶ **Include data from all test takers in performance reports.**
Even with the active participation of students with disabilities in assessment programs, exclusion can still occur at the later stages of data aggregation and analysis. Some states remove the scores of students with disabilities from their testing database before further analyses are conducted. Others remove the scores of those students who took the tests under accommodated conditions, even if the accommodations have no impact on the test's validity.

NCEO recommends that accountability reports include testing information on all students who took the test, either with or without accommodations. If particular accommodations have the potential of invalidating test scores, such scores could be reported separately until research is conducted to support or discourage this separation.

How performance on alternate assessments should be reported is still debated. Some states have devised ways to merge data from alternate assessments with data from regular assessments by using a common scoring rubric. Other states are planning to report data from their alternate assessment separate from data from their regular assessment. Regardless of approach, the bottom line is that data on all assessed students must be reported in some way.

▶ **Include rates of exclusion that are specific to students with disabilities and the reasons for the exclusion.**
In states with assessments that have high stakes for teachers, schools, or administrators, students with disabilities may be encouraged to not participate in testing due to fears that scores from such students could lower overall school or district averages. Such unfair practices can be curtailed by requiring that exclusion rates be included in any public reporting of test results.

Reporting rates of exclusion, however, should not be limited to those situations in which there are high stakes. It is always important to report on exclusion so that comparability of results can be assessed. Federal law now supports this by requiring that the number of students with disabilities taking the statewide assessment is reported along with performance results.

Although not required by IDEA, reporting the reason for exclusion will assist in pinpointing ways to increase participation of students with disabilities in assessments. For example, high rates of exclusion due to absenteeism suggest a different issue from high rates of exclusion due to IEP team decisions that students are unable to participate due to emotional distress. Making this information

public through reporting will drive changes in inappropriate practices.

▶ **Calculate participation or exclusion rates using consistent written guidelines for the rates.** In order to better ascertain how students with disabilities are being included in statewide assessment programs, states need to provide schools and districts better direction about how participation rates should be determined. In many cases, students with disabilities at the age or grade level being tested are considered ineligible for testing, and systematically excluded from testing populations because of their program setting or type of disability. This form of exclusion leads to inflating the reported rates of test participation because those excluded are not even considered eligible.

▶ **Maintain records in such a way that data for students with disabilities can be reported separately, overall, or by other breakdowns.** To investigate whether new programs, methods of instruction, or curricula are affecting student performance, schools and districts may find it useful to break out performance data not just between special and regular education students, but also by different service delivery models, disability categories, or types of accommodations requested (see Table 1).

The question of aggregating or disaggregating test scores for students with disabilities rests on the purposes underlying the assessment. If used for holding schools and districts accountable for the success of *all* students, then aggregating the scores from all students is an equitable approach

Table 1. Examples of Data Elements and Coding Options That May Facilitate Appropriate Reporting Procedures

Data Element	Coding Options
• Student's participation in the accountability system.	• An indication of whether student took the regular assessment, the regular assessment with accommodations, an alternate assessment, a partial assessment, or no assessment.
• Student's primary disability.	• The federal category for which student receives primary special education services.
• Student's related services.	• The type of related services a student receives (e.g., occupational therapy, physical therapy).
• Student's placement.	• The placement of student's special education services (e.g., regular classroom resource, self-contained).
• Student's functional learning characteristics (e.g., estimated reading level).	• Any one of an array of variables that provides information about the student's learning and functional characteristics beyond a mere categorical label.
• Accommodations used during the assessment (by category or by specific accommodation).	• An indication of the accommodations used by a student during assessment.

Note: *This table is adapted from Thurlow, Elliott, and Ysseldyke (1997, in press). Reprinted with permission from Corwin Press.*

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to reporting. However, if test results are intended to assist in making programmatic improvements and curricular evaluation, then disaggregation becomes equally important.

IASA requires that performance data eventually be reported separately for different disability categories. The only reason for not doing so is when such reporting would threaten confidentiality of student identities. For example, in a district with only one student with a visual impairment, reporting performance by category of disability would essentially be the same as publicly reporting the performance of that individual student.

▶ **Keep records of the use of accommodations according to the type of accommodation.**
Testing accommodations are needed to allow some students with disabilities to participate fully in assessment programs. An accommodation can take different forms, from providing extended time to a student, to offering a scribe to record the student's responses (see NCEO Policy Directions 7, *Providing Assessment Accommodations for Students with Disabilities in State and District Assessments*).

Documenting the use of accommodations offers several benefits, including: (1) it gives testing administrators the opportunity to enforce policies that limit accommodations to those that the student uses during instruction; and (2) it provides information for further research about their use in testing.

▶ **Inform parents about the reporting policy for their child's data.**
Parents of students with disabilities need to be aware of how their children's scores will be used in the public reporting of results. Parents should be given notification as to whether test scores for their students will be aggregated along with those of students in regular education programs. They also should understand any implications of using accommodations during testing, such as the removal of accommodated test scores from overall analysis or reporting. And they should be shown how participation in testing programs can ultimately improve the educational opportunities provided to their children.

▶ Recommendations

At the very least, states need to report the academic performance of students with disabilities with the same regularity as they do for students without disabilities. Such reporting has benefits beyond meeting federal mandates. Including students with disabilities in educational accountability systems and reporting results help ensure that students with disabilities do not fall through the cracks of educational systems. They provide an environment where *all* students are more likely to get equal opportunity to meet their educational needs.

For many educators, results-based learning has always meant more than test scores. Requirements within federal special education law mandate that goals be established to assist each student with a disability in his or her transition from school to adult life. Specific objectives define successful outcomes in such areas as post-secondary education and employment, and interagency efforts are put into place to make those goals a reality. Practitioners and policymakers need to consider these efforts when planning and implementing systems of public reporting. While IDEA now requires states to report dropout rates and graduation rates in addition to assessment information, additional information may be useful. New methods of data collection, both during and after secondary education, can contribute a more comprehensive picture of student success.

▶ Resources

Assessment Guidelines That Maximize the Participation of Students with Disabilities in Large-scale Assessments: Characteristics and Considerations (Synthesis Report 25). Elliott, J., Thurlow, M., and Ysseldyke, J. (1996). Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota, National Center on Educational Outcomes.

Increasing the Participation of Students with Disabilities in State and District Assessments (NCEO Policy Directions 6). Thurlow, M., Ysseldyke, J., Erickson, R., and Elliott, J. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota, National Center on Educational Outcomes.

Neglected Numerators, Drifting Denominators, and Fractured Fractions: Determining Participation Rates for Students with Disabilities in Statewide Assessment Programs (Synthesis Report 23). Erickson, R., Thurlow, M., and Ysseldyke, J., (1996). Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota, National Center on Educational Outcomes.

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State Accountability Reports: What Do They Say About Students with Disabilities? (Technical Report 20). Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota, National Center on Educational Outcomes. (1997, in press.)

Testing Students with Disabilities: Practical Strategies for Complying with District and State Requirements. Thurlow, M., Elliott, J., & Ysseldyke, J. (1997, in press). Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press. (Due out in Oct.) ▲

Footnote

[1] This reporting requirement holds only if "doing so would be statistically sound and results would not be identifiable to individual children."

About NCEO

The National Center on Educational Outcomes (NCEO) was established in 1990 to provide national leadership in the identification of outcomes and indicators to monitor educational results for all students, including students with disabilities. NCEO addresses the participation of students with disabilities in national and state assessments, standards-setting efforts, and graduation requirements.

The Center represents a collaborative effort of the University of Minnesota, the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO), and the National Association of State Directors of Special Education (NASDSE).

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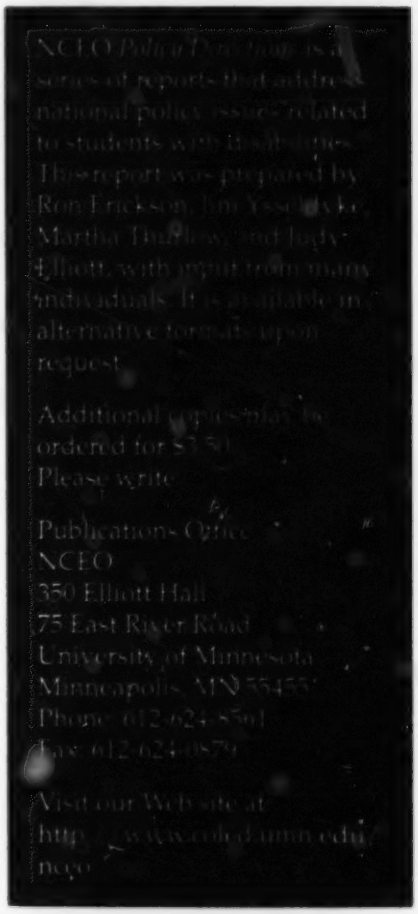

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